YEAR 1 ANNUAL REPORT

SOUTHWEST CUSTOM FEED SAMPLING AND NUTRITION CONSULTING
PILOT PROJECT D-87-01-0324

OBJECTIVES

To reduce input cost and increase profitability of livestock operations through increased use of feed analysis and ration balancing.

To increase the use of feed analysis services and application of balanced rations by providing a custom feed sampling and nutrition consulting service to southwest beef producers.

To test the need or demand of such services by charging 1/2 the sampling and feed analysis service to the co-operators in the second year.

To promote the benefits of feed testing and ration balancing as a beef management practice.

PROJECT DESIGN

Seven Ag. Rep. districts were to select up to 10 beef producers each to have their feeds custom sampled, analyzed and professionally balanced for their winter feeding programs. The first year custom sampling and feed analysis costs were reimbursed by ADF to a maximum of $203.00 per producer. Information sheets were filled out by the sampling technicians in consultation with each co-operator. Rations were then balanced with respect to TDN, protein, calcium, phosphorus and cost using feed test results and nutrient requirements of beef cattle for Saskatchewan conditions. This was done by the Feed Test Lab, the U of S Animal and Poultry Science and Extension Livestock Specialist.

Finally the individual consulting was to be conducted by Southwest Ag. Reps and Livestock Specialist to interpret and rework rations where necessary to provide maximum producer understanding and acceptance of balanced least cost rations.

Year II will provide 50% cost recovery to determine if producers deem custom sampling, feed analysis and ration balancing as beneficial and economical in their beef enterprises.

PROCEDURE

Sixty five producers were selected in seven Ag. Rep. districts in the southwest with emphasis on first time feedtest clients and maximum coverage of our Ag. Rep. district ie. one per R.M.

Two technicians were hired from the central and eastern part of the region. They were supplied with a gas powered drill, feed test probe and feed analysis supplies. The technicians then visited each farm. Representative samples of 231 forage, 89 grain and 8 rations were taken and beef information sheets were filled out in consultation with the co-operators. Samples were then mailed in and analysed by the feed test lab. Rations were then balanced based on the information sheets supplied and sent to the producers by December 1, 1987. Individual consultation was provided by the Ag. Reps, U of S and Livestock Specialist using computers to interpret the rations and make any necessary changes based on producer preference and cost. This was completed by January 30, 1988.

CONCLUSIONS

The co-operators were very interested in the analysis of their feedstuffs and in some cases surprised by the quality of some of their feedstuffs. Frequently comparisons were made between cutting stages of crops and feed types. The technicians were very well received and were a valuable part of the project. Producers were shown the value of taking representative samples and how to take samples and fill out the information sheets.

A major part of the project was to have the rations balanced based on the information sheet by the Feedtest Lab in order to promote the service that was available. Some problems were encountered since the U of S and Livestock Specialist had to assist in balancing 1/3 of the ration on the first phase, this had not been anticipated in the project design. The importance of this phase was to determine the adequacy of this service and general producer understanding of how the cattle should be fed. All the producers received their rations by December 1, 1988 which was essential and appreciated by most of the producers.

The individual consultation phase proved to be very beneficial and a valuable extension tool. Ag. Reps received some valuable experience in computer nutrition and ration balancing as a result also. Some problems were encountered, as a result 55 of the 65 producers were consulted with. Due to shortage of staff ie.one of the Ag. Reps at Assiniboia left, time constraints by both staff and producers and some producers being satisfied with what they had, 10 of the 65 producers were not individually consulted with using the computer.

The computer proved to be a very valuable teaching tool in that producers could see what nutrients were lacking and which feeds contributed what to the rations. The value was also shown in being able to give cost/head/day on various rations and the time it took to do numerous rations was substantially reduced. Of the producers consulted approximately 90% did not understand the feed analysis report, primarily the 90% dry matter conversion. Approximately 50% did not understand the rations they were

supplied from phase one. In numerous cases too many feedstuffs were used in combination and the % in the ration was not understood. The majority of the producers related % in the ration to volume rather than weight. An example of this is a ration of 35% hay, 35% straw and 30% grain would be interpreted as 1/3 mix mill of grain and bale for bale of hay and straw until the mill is full.

In conclusion all four parts of the project were necessary to meet the objectives of this project. Although individual consulting was time consuming and stretched our resources thin at times it was essential to give producers a better understanding of nutrition and ration balancing. A large percentage of the co-operators would not have been able to easily multiply and divide numbers which we do routinely in order to understand and change rations to meet their needs.

SUMMARY

This project has proved to be a very interesting and valuable exercise for both Ag. Reps and co-ooperating beef producers in promoting feed testing and ration balancing as a management tool. In most cases producers were over feeding and were able to save up to 75 cents/head/day over their present feeding methods resulting in substantial savings over the winters feeding period.

As these producers have one or two years of experience with this project the present system of balancing rations from information sheets may be adequate, but for the majority of first time clients ration were not understood or suitable for application.

Costs were one of the key items in selling ration balancing, therefore, greater emphasis should be placed on this area.

Some concern arises that the ration balancing service the feedtest lab has been providing to date may not be available in the future and other than Extension Services no other widespread system is in place for producers who want the service, granted some veterinarians and Feed Companies will provide the service but it is hit and miss in Southwest Region.

It should be very interesting to see how many producers participate in the second year of the project since it will be based on a 50% cost recovery bases.

Respectfully submitted
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773-2866

Abstract for Custom Feed Sampling
and Nutrition Consulting Project
D-87-01-0324

This project was conducted as a result of many years of promoting feedtesting and ration balancing with only limited success in having beef producers use this service as an accepted management tool. The objectives were to promote the use of custom feed sampling, feedtesting and ration balancing to S.W. beef producers.

The project contained five phases; selection of ten producers throughout each Ag. Rep. district, custom feed sampling by one of two technicians, feed analysis and ration balancing by the Feed Test Lab and individual consultation by a professional agrologist of Extension Services using a computer.

The project proved to be a very effective method of Extension of feedtesting and ration balancing and each phase was essential to the success of the project in encouraging beef producers to continue to have their feeds tested and professionally balanced based on their animals nutrient requirements and costs.

The second year of the project should be an excellent indication of the impact this project has had on beef producers management decisions due to some cost recovery being included.

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